

A COMMUNAL ROOST OF GRAY CATBIRDS AT ECO POND, EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK

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On 29 December 1993, Cathi Sullins and I were birding at Eco Pond west of the Flamingo Visitor Center in Everglades National Park. We arrived at approximately 1600 hours to watch flights of ibis, herons, and egrets returning to the roost in the hammock in the pond. During the next 15-20 minutes we birded from the wooden observation platform on the south side of the pond. In addition to the larger wading birds that were returning to the pond's roosts, flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) arrived and swiftly disappeared into the "island" stands of cattails (*Typha* sp.) and rushes (*Juncus* sp.). Three times during this period I observed individual Gray Catbirds (*Dumetella carolinensis*) fly from the shrub woodlands bordering the pond's grassy perimeter to a single island of cattails and rushes standing some 5-6 m from the bank and approximately 20 m west of the observation platform. Like the returning red-wings, the catbirds quickly disappeared downward into the thickest areas of the stand and did not reappear.

In the next 30 minutes we slowly walked around the pond in a counterclockwise direction. Eventually, we approached this same clump of cattails and rushes from the opposite side as our path took us full circle around the pond. By this time the sun was low in the sky and many flights of birds were returning to the pond's roosts. When we were within approximately 20 m of the stand we saw two more Gray Catbirds dart from the woody shrubs, cross the 6 m of bordering grass and fly into it. Presently, another catbird followed their route from the woodland shrub to the cattails. During the next 10-12 minutes, in ones and twos, at least 12 more Gray Catbirds followed suit. Each went directly to the cattails, landed in the upper third of the vegetation and then dropped downward quickly out of sight. None reappeared. Their behavior was similar to that of the Red-winged Blackbirds returning to roost for the night and I believe this is what the catbirds were doing.

This cattail-rush stand was surrounded by water and was approximately 15 m long by 1-4 m wide. It is possible that additional catbirds entered this clump during the time we walked the pond's edge and were screened from viewing it.

In my 30 years of ornithological field observations I have never before observed this communal roosting behavior in the Gray Catbird, nor have I seen catbirds roost in cattail stands in a pond.

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